

Mullica Hill Town Hall
South Main Street (Bridgeton Pike)
and Woodstown Road
Mullica Hill
Gloucester County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-839

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

MULLICA HILL TOWN HALL

Location: South Main Street (Bridgeton Pike) and Woodstown Road, Mullica Hill, Gloucester County, New Jersey

Present Owner: The Township of Harrison, New Jersey

Present Occupant: Harrison Township Historical Society, Inc.

Present Use: Historical Society headquarters, museum, and library

Statement of Significance: This 1871 building is a noteworthy example of mid-Victorian meeting-hall architecture, and one of the few of its type still standing in Gloucester County, New Jersey. Its spacious second-floor meeting hall served as the principal public hall in the area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: August, 1871.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a complete chain of title, from 1808 to the present, to the land of which the structure stands. Reference is the Clerk's Office of the County of Gloucester, New Jersey.

1808 Deed March 9, 1808 recorded March 10, 1809 in Book M page 313
Mary, Sarah, Lindsey Nicholson,
Wm. Kates and Wife Martha N. and
John Nicholson
to
James Gardiner

1826 Will written September 20, 1826 probated November 7, 1831
James Gardiner
to
Wife and Children
["After death or marriage of wife I order it
be divided equally between 3 daughters (namely)

Ann, Mary and Elizabeth. etc."]

- 1850 Deed February 8, 1850 recorded May 11, 1850 in
Book K 4 page 691
Mary Gardiner Engle
to
Ann and Elizabeth Gardiner
- 1850 Deed March / /, 1850 recorded May 11, 1850 in
Book K 4 page 692
Ann and Elizabeth Gardiner
to
Joshua and Mary G. Engle
- 1871 Deed March 24, 1871 recorded April 4, 1871 in
Book M 5 page 128
Joshua Engle and Mary
to
Joseph Jessup, Nathan Stratten and
Thomas Sharp -- Stock company to build Hall
- 1882 Deed January 17, 1882 recorded February 4,
1882 in Book 131 page 38
Joshua Engle and Mary
to
Samuel Haines
- 1882 Deed January 17, 1882 recorded February 4,
1882 in Book 131 page 40
Joseph Jessup, Nathan Stratten and
Thomas Sharp
to
Samuel Haines
- 1883 Deed March 24, 1883 recorded April 12, 1883 in
Book 133 page 262
Samuel Haines
to
Inhabitants of Township of Harrison
- [1971 Leased and occupied by the Harrison Township
Historical Society, Inc., since 1971 and used
as society headquarters, museum, and library.]
4. Builders, suppliers:
- a. Builder: Mr. Thomas L. Sharp [Constitution, August 9,
1871, n.p.p.]

- b. Suppliers: Mr. Joseph Jessup, supplier of oak frame lumber; Mr. Isaac Stevenson, supplier of cedar siding.
5. Original plans and construction: A reprint of the original specifications from the Woodbury Constitution, Woodbury, N.J., May 31, 1871, is included in Archut, p. 575.
- "Size of building 36' x 50', 26' post. Lower story, the girder will run lengthwise of the building; joist to be framed 16" between centers, well tusked; studding 16" between centers, to be 10' high in the clear; to be divided into 4 rooms and vestibule, with 2 sets of stairs with railing, six doors and 12 windows. The second story to be 14' high in the clear, with 11 windows; the girder to run lengthwise of the building; joist to be framed 12" between centers and well dovetailed at the ends, studding 16" between centers. Roof to be trussed with 3 truss beams, six foot pitch, and well covered with boards ready for the tin man; the upper joists to be framed 16" between centers. The building to be enclosed with cedar siding not to exceed 5" to the weather; eave to project 22" with plain surfaced 2-1/2" from the window, raking cornices, 7" crown mould; gable end to be finished with raking cornice, to project the same as the eave. The main hall to be wainscoted 3' high, doors and windows to be finished with plain 4" mouldings, windows to be double hung and weighted; window frames will be finished ready made; door frames to be made by the contractor. All necessary lumber will be furnished by the committee. White pine and cedar will be surfaced. Proposals for plastering the above named hall are also solicited. The rooms to be lathed and plastered with two brown coats of plaster and hard finished, all plain work."
6. Alterations and additions: In January and February 1891, the south room on the first floor was partitioned into two rooms and the open meeting hall on the second floor was partitioned off at the stairwell (C. Knisell, Carpenter); in October 1899, electric lights were installed; sometime before 1900, a stage was constructed over the top of the original stage; in October 1903, a closet was built in the northwest room, first floor (the Committee Room since 1873); in 1920, the building was moved back from the road to its present location; in December 1971, the superimposed stage was removed to expose the original.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

A private Stock Company, known as the "Town Hall Association" of Mullica Hill, New Jersey, was organized in 1871 to raise funds to build the Town Hall, which was to cost between \$3,500 and \$4,000. Stock certificates were issued, with shares selling at \$5.00 each. The Township paid \$500 for shares, and had the privilege of holding elections and town meetings in the Hall. The Association maintained the building until its purchase by the Township of Harrison on March 24, 1883. The Town Hall served as a community center for the area, and as such was the site of local graduations, lectures, entertainments and dances. In 1926 Stark Brothers Nursery of St. Louis celebrated here the discovery of the "Starking" apple, which afterwards became a variety of national importance. (The "sport"—a red apple on a tree of green apples--had been found on a farm in near-by Ferrell, New Jersey.)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Gloucester County Deed Books (M, K4, M5, 131, 133),
Gloucester County Courthouse, Woodbury, New Jersey.

Harrison Township Committee Records, Harrison Township,
Gloucester County, New Jersey. March 16, 1857 -
February 6, 1879; March 17, 1879 - February 12,
1898; March 15, 1898 - January 1, 1910.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Archut, Raymond. Notes on Old Gloucester County.
Vol. 1V, Section VI. Woodbury, N.J.: Gloucester
County Historical Society, 1964.

"New Town Hall at Mullica Hill." The Woodbury (N.J.)
Constitution (August 9, 1871), n.pp.

Special Announcement of the New Starking, King of All
Red Apples. St. Louis, Mo.: Stark Bros. Nursery,
1926.

D. Likely Sources not yet Investigated:

Spicer Family Records (source not yet located).

"Town Hall Association" Records (not yet located).

PREPARED BY:

Mr. James F. Turk
Curator, Harrison Town-
ship Historical Society Museum
and
Mrs. Joseph A. Smith
Research Staff, Harrison
Township Historical
Society
December 1972

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This modest two-story rectangular frame structure is a noteworthy example of meeting-hall architecture of the 1870's. Its outstanding feature is the large second-story bay window which projects above the main entrance and is supported by two fluted cast-iron columns with bases and capitals.
2. Condition of fabric: The facade is in good condition. The interior appears to be structurally sound, but finishes on the first floor show the effect of time. The building is now in process of restoration and rehabilitation.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: A two-story structure, 36'-3" (three-bay front) x 50'-3", excluding the porch on the east facade and the second-story bay window on the north facade.
2. Foundations: Concrete, with brick piers supporting wooden girders. There is no basement. Access to the crawl space under the first floor is provided via two trap doors in the floor.
3. Wall construction: Based upon structure visible in the crawl space under the first floor, this is a typical wooden

frame structure with cedar siding. Clapboards are 9/16" thick, 5" to the weather.

4. Porches: The portico formed by the bay window on the front facade has a bracketed cornice with consoles, supported by two fluted cast-iron columns with bases and capitals. A hexastyle porch extends 40'-3" along the east facade and projects about 5'-6" from the wall. Its sloping roof with central pediment is supported by six turned wooden posts measuring 6-1/2" x 6-1/2" on the square portions. Evidence indicates that ornamented wooden brackets--and possibly horizontal grille work supported by the brackets--were employed to embellish the porch. A shingled wooden hood shelters the west rear door.
5. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys within the framing of the east and west walls project into the interior of the rooms. Clay chimney pots rise well above the sloping roof.
6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance doorway on the north contains double wooden doors with two panels each. The upper panels are moulded in semicircular form. Above is a straight, two-light transom. Two paneled wooden doors open off the porch, each having a single glass light in the upper section. The glass may have been added at a later date. The rear door on the west side may also be a later addition.
- b. Windows and shutters: First and second-floor windows have wooden two-over-two light, double-hung sash with plain wooden trim. The large floor-length front window in the rectangular bay is two-over-four light, double-hung sash; the side windows are one-over-one light, double-hung sash; all three are embellished with decorative moulding and bracketed cornices. The bay projects 8'-3" over the main entrance and measures 12'-8" along the facade.

Two pairs of original shutters (three-paneled) survive at the windows flanking the main entrance. Evidence indicates that shutters were installed only at the first-floor windows.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Simple pedimented gable roof with modern asphalt shingles.

- b. Framing: Trussed roof, sheathed.
- c. Cornice, eaves: There is a continuous cornice around all four sides of the building and around the bay window. Wide overhanging eaves with flat wooden soffits are supported by widely-spaced, heavy wooden brackets, with two modillions spaced at equal intervals between the brackets.
- d. Dormers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: A stairhall occupies the entire front end of the building, with two stairways leading to the second floor. A modern toilet room has been installed under the west staircase; the area under the east staircase has been partitioned off for a closet. Two doorways open from the hall into two separate rooms. A third room behind the other two was partitioned off in 1891 to create a fourth room. The partition is composed of double-faced vertical beaded wood. The simple molded baseboards and trim appear to be original at some openings. The original use of the rooms is not certain at this time; however, the northwest room has been known as the Committee Room since 1893.
- b. Second floor:

Originally one large room, the second floor was partitioned at the stairwell in 1891. The stairhall is separated from the Meeting Hall by a floor-to-ceiling wooden partition of vertical beaded, tongue-and-groove boards, with a pair of large side sliding doors centered opposite the large bay window in the stairhall. This change apparently was made to create privacy as well as to conserve heat. Evidence of thimbles appears in the brick chimneys on the east and west walls. Wood or coal burning stoves probably were used to heat this spacious Hall. There is a speakers' platform against the south wall which appears to be original. Steps lead up to it from the left and right. The platform is 24" high and floored over with random-width yellow pine. There are two panels on the front of the

platform and one panel on either side of the steps. Vertical beaded wooden wainscot, 5-1/2" face, with plain wooden cap and no base, covers the wall to a height of 3'-1" on the entire second floor, except in the stair hall. The window sill height is the same as the wainscot.

- c. Attic: Access to the attic is provided by a small flush door in the north gable above the bay window.
 - d. Cellar: None--there is crawl space only. Access to the crawl space under the first floor is provided via two trap doors in the floor.
- 2. Stairways: At each end of the stairhall is a stairway to the second floor. Both stairways are U-shaped in plan and are open string. Each is enhanced with a massive turned newel post at the first riser. The balustrade has turned balusters--two to each tread--and molded handrails terminating on the second floor adjacent to the wooden partition installed in 1891. Evidence shows that the balustrades continued with a return and terminated against the east and west walls.
 - 3. Flooring: Flooring is 1-1/4" thick, random-width, tongue-and-groove yellow pine.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster over wood lath.
 - 5. Trim: The most notable decorative features are three circular cast-plaster, foliated wreaths on the second floor ceiling of the Meeting Hall. A kerosene chandelier apparently was suspended from the center of each motif. Plaster cornice moldings of small-scaled multiple membering are continuous in all the spaces of the second floor.
 - 6. Notable hardware: The main entrance doors appear to have the original brass lock and knobs.
 - 7. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
 - 8. Heating: Modern warm-air, gas unit heater on the second floor. First floor is not occupied at present.
- D. Site:
- 1. General setting and orientation: The structure is

situated on a triangular-shaped property, bounded on two sides by Bridgeton Pike (Main Street) and Woodstown Road. The main entrance faces north. Widening of the Woodstown Road in 1920 necessitated moving the Town Hall and out-building to its present location. The original location has not yet been determined.

2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: A simple frame privy is situated southwest of the Town Hall. It is a wood-sided structure with gable roof, having two batten doors on the north side and two barn sash. The original portion measures approximately 17'-4" x 10'-2", and is partitioned into two areas--the privy on the west end and a storage room on the east end. An addition on the west gable end has a pair of garage doors. The structure was relocated in 1920.
4. Walks: Modern concrete.
5. Monuments: Stone monument with bronze plaques--World War I plaque dedicated 1920; World War II, 1941 - 1945; Korean War, 1950 - 1953, dedicated 1958.
6. Landscaping: Trees, shrubs, and privet hedge.

Prepared by Joseph Petrak
Architect
Member, Harrison
Township Historical
Society
December 1972

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1972 as a project of the Harrison Township Historical Society, Inc., which has generously donated them to the HABS collection. The Society has leased and occupied the Mullica Hill Town Hall since 1971 and uses the building as its headquarters, museum, and library.

The project was under the direction of the Society's Museum Curator, Mr. James F. Turk. Project participants were Mrs. Joseph A. Smith, a member of the Society's Research Staff, and Mr. Joseph Petrak, Staff Architect of the Society. (Formerly an architect with the National Park Service, Mr. Petrak is now retired.) Photographs were made by Mr. Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer.